

THE USE OF INDOOR SPACE AND EQUIPMENT

More important than WHAT you have in your classroom is:

- **How is the room arranged?**
Is the space being used effectively?
What is the atmosphere like?
- **How are the materials being used?**
Are they appropriate to the developmental needs and interest of the children?
Are the children encouraged to explore the materials creatively and given a chance to choose from a variety of activities?

It is necessary to look at the room arrangement of the center from many points of view. The teacher needs to consider what is educationally advantageous as well as what is environmentally and fire safe. An attractive, uncluttered center invites children to be:

- Independent.
- Decision makers.
- Responsible.

The Use of Space

How space is used (that is, how the room is arranged) determines to a great extent how the children and the teacher behave.

How would you **like** them to behave? What are your center's goals and are they being reached?

In deciding how to set up the room, several things should be considered:

- **Dead space** (open space – without boundaries - such as in the middle of the room) invites running and wrestling.
- **Paths** (not a line on the floor; rather, a clear direction to move when going from one activity to another) can successfully guide children from one area to another. Paths allow children to walk around other activities instead of through them.
- Provide space for active and quiet play to go on simultaneously. Noisy and quiet areas should be separated. Rugs can be used to muffle noise; shelves and dividers can be used to enclose areas.
- Provide a place that is quiet and protected. Children will read books alone or just sit quietly for periods of time to escape the stimulation of the group.

This quiet place needs to be protected from infringement from other activities.

- **Transition areas** (areas with quiet, less overwhelming activities) should be set up near the entrance in order to make the transition from home to school and from outdoor play to indoor play less abrupt.
- Present an uncluttered appearance that encourages children to take pride in their environment. Children can be expected to maintain the environment in an orderly way. An environment without order is sometimes over-stimulating to children and causes them to miss activities that are available.
- Plan storage areas so that equipment that is frequently used is available and easily accessible for the children to choose. They then have some control of the environment.
- Plan areas so as to encourage independence and decision making. If the adult is the only one choosing materials, we are creating dependence on the part of children. Preschool children should be able to make reasonable decisions. If a child chooses not to do an art activity, he will learn the consequences of decision making when the activity is through or when he has no completed project. Note: Children are more concerned with the process while adults are concerned with the finished project. Plan areas for process activities, but do not pressure for a finished project.
- A loosely organized classroom (where activity areas are separated and therefore are seldom congested) will probably have a less pressured atmosphere for both the teachers and the children. On the other hand, if play areas (such as housekeeping and blocks) are close together, the chances are greater that good dramatic play will occur – but more supervision and guidance will be needed.

Consider the possibility of having a more open, less pressured classroom at the beginning of the year and then adding activities as the children grow in both age and experience.

- Activities placed side-by-side may merge in unanticipated ways – and in ways that are sometimes undesirable. For example, block building should not extend into an area for riding trucks. It creates an unsafe situation for both activities. Create boundaries or move one activity to another part of the room.
- Environmental Safety-look at the center and determine potentially hazardous areas. Determine ways to reduce or eliminate the hazards. For example, is there a chance that a child on a climber could fall and hit his

head on a sharp corner? Is there an uncovered plug that might invite foreign objects?

- Fire Safety-look at the arrangement and determine if children and adults could easily evacuate the room. Is any equipment blocking an exit? Will stored equipment (e.g., blocks) present a hazard or block an exit when out of storage?

INDOOR PLAY AREAS AND INTEREST CENTERS

Block Area

- Make low shelves with compartments or containers for different types of materials.
- Make blocks with different length cuts from 2x4s, 2x6s, etc.; have two sizes of milk carton blocks (can be made from painted or covered quart or gallon cartons); use boxes with dividers inside for storing cars, trucks, animals, people, cardboard tubes, Styrofoam pieces; use wooden pieces or cardboard and bolts of fabric, old bedspreads or blankets to construct houses, tents, caves, etc.; use a large carton or crate from large appliances for houses-cut out windows and doors and decorate; use large cartons for making an imaginary vehicle by adding doors and a cardboard steering wheel; use a low sturdy table such as a piano bench for playing with cars, games, etc.
- Have a rug for noise control.

Book Corner (and a place for a child to be alone when he chooses)

Books and a display rack; rug or mattress to sit on and/or a table with chairs; pillows to sit on or lean against; easy chair, couch or child-size rocking chair.

Housekeeping Corner

- Kitchen appliances, such as a sink, stove, refrigerator, and cupboard (can be made from crates or cartons). A basic, stove, refrigerator and sink set can be expanded with a small table and chairs.
- Doll bed (carton or crate can be used); dolls and doll clothes.
- Clothes and accessories for women, men, workmen, etc. (including toy tools, flashlight, handbags, small telephones (not too heavy), etc.). Chest or hooks on wall for dress-up clothes and a mirror.
- Old dishes, pots, pans, and utensils; empty food containers.
- Cleaning supplies – mop, broom, dustpan, sponges, scrub brushes, towels, and vacuum cleaner.
- Pillows, blankets.

Dramatic Play Materials - in addition to those listed above

- Props for special people: mailperson, doctor, fireperson, garage mechanic, barber, grocer, shoe repair person, waitress/waiter, salesperson, etc. These items can be stored in individual boxes of items for different role plays.
- Puppets – lots of varieties exist and they are easy to make; puppet stage (use a large carton).
- Doll house and furniture (can be homemade)
- Stories to act out – with props, if desired.

Flannel Board

Make flannel stories available to the children during free play for additional play spaces.

Water and Sand Play (also try salt, rice, dried beans, etc.)

- Table for sand or water – or use several plastic dishpans
- Pouring, sifting and measuring devices – funnels, cups, spoons, bowls, strainers, etc.
- For water play, try paint brushes, scrub brushes, sponges, squirt bottles, bubble blowing, floating and sinking experiments, and snow experiments.

Art Area

Paint; finger paint (use liquid starch or cornstarch); glue; paste; pencils; crayons; markers; scissors; a junk box containing bits of ribbon, cardboard tubes, wrapping paper, laces, material, buttons, plastic flowers; easel; glitter; food coloring; paper punch; old magazines or catalogues.

Table Toys and Games

Materials are too numerous to list. Keep in mind that many of materials needed for these areas can be obtained free or handmade.

Science Corner

- Table with shelves or drawers.
- Scale, such as a balance scale (can be homemade).
- Magnets – with objects to attract and repel.
- Magnifying glass.
- Measuring devices –rule, yardstick, measuring cups and spoons.
- Science experiments (e.g., baking soda and vinegar).
- Seeds to grow, plants.
- Smelling jars.

- Touch and feel box (can be made with milk cartons).
- Things to take apart and examine: alarm clock, keys and locks, nut and bolts, etc.
- Treasures: leaves, shells, rocks, sticks, flowers, bark, nuts, weeds, etc.
- Goldfish and bowl.

Large Muscle Activity Area (see also Block Area)

Climbing and jumping apparatus; mat; mattress; a bouncing, jumping surface (can be homemade); rocking boat or horse; ride-on cars and trucks; tunnel; balance beam (easy to make); bean bags and place to toss them; balls; jump ropes.

Small Muscle Area

Pegs and pegboards; sand paper letters (can be made); Dominoes; additional puzzles; rubber band boards (can be made); shape, color or object lottos (can be made); jars and matching tops; tongs and cotton balls; nuts and bolts for matching. If each of these types of items were individually contained in small plastic containers or in shoe boxes and labeled, there would be many choices in this area. Purchased toys might include Legos, Lincoln logs, tinker toys, and shape sorters.

Music Corner

- Instruments for children – purchased and/or homemade.
- Scarves, bells, feathers, or flags for dancing.
- CD/record player for children to use.
- Different types of music for marching and different motions, songs to sing, quiet music, etc.
- Piano, guitar, etc. for teacher.

Cooking Equipment

- Pots, pans, muffin tins, and bowls.
- Utensils – egg beater, spoons, measuring cups and spoons, etc.
- Portable oven (unless kitchen oven is available).
- Plates, cups, spoons, forks, and knives (dull and non-serrated).

Woodworking Equipment

- Workbench or a board on the floor (2' x 2' – covered with old carpet to muffle the noise, if desired).
- Small, but real, tools and supplies – hammers, nails, sandpaper, wire, screwdriver, screws, hand drill, plane, and vise and saw (if possible).
- Soft wood scraps – pine is best.

- Pieces of Styrofoam and chunks of corrugated cardboard for children who can't or don't want to use wood.
- Toy tools can be used with Styrofoam and cardboard. Golf tees can be used instead of nails.
- Odds and ends to nail or wire onto wood – spools, cardboard shapes, nylon mesh, sponge pieces, aluminum foil, pieces of straws, etc.
- Pegboard or box to store tools.

Sensory Area

Only your imagination holds you back here. So many of these things can be made or scrounged. Play dough; water play; cornmeal play; shucked corn; a small plastic baby tub; cookie cutters; a variety of different sized cups and bottles; squeeze bottles, sifter, sieve, funnel, strainer, plastic knives, rolling pin, etc. All can be donated or purchased at the dollar store.